

For the attention of readers:

On 21 May 2021, this evidence was changed to reflect an update communicated to the Committee by the MOD. Specifically, the revised written evidence includes the replacement of two previous paragraphs (40 and 41) that contained an inaccurate interpretation of statistics. They have been replaced with a single paragraph (now numbered 40). To avoid changes to the paragraph numbering of the rest of the file, paragraph 41 is omitted from this file

15 January 2021

HCDC INQUIRY 'WOMEN IN THE ARMED FORCES: FROM RECRUITMENT TO CIVILIAN LIFE' – MINISTRY OF DEFENCE WRITTEN EVIDENCE**Executive Summary**

1. Today's Armed Forces (AF) have changed enormously in the last 30 years and women can serve in all roles across an AF that is more diverse, more tolerant and more professional. However, we recognise that we still have a long way to go to achieve our goal of being a truly diverse and inclusive organisation that, in addition to being one of the best militaries in the world, is also one of the top employers in the country.

1. Do female service personnel face unique and/or additional challenges in the Armed Forces?

2. The Ministry of Defence (MOD) has seen marked, positive change in certain aspects of Diversity and Inclusion (D&I) over recent years, with all military roles now open to women, legislative changes ensuring that flexible working is a reality and an increasing presence of networks and champions able to help translate lived experience into further policy change. There is still, however, more that can be done; evidence suggests that servicewomen face unique and additional challenges compared with servicemen. Overall, being a woman is reported to impact negatively on 'Lived Experience' in the AF, noting, however, that this is also the case for many other characteristics (including social class, age and position within the organisation).

3. There are various examples of challenges specific to being women. Such themes include 'organisational' or 'structural' inclusivity issues which impact on feelings of value, such as workplace and resourcing needs or understanding of such needs (e.g. pre or post-natal needs, menopause), patriarchal but well-meaning management styles, career progression and, in particular, work-life balance and wellbeing issues. The greatest challenge to work-life balance is experienced by Regular servicewomen with children, often as the primary caregiver having to face a choice between family and the demands of Service life. This finding is consistent with the Council of Europe's Parliamentary Assembly 2016, highlighting that servicewomen are more likely to leave the Services than servicemen when their children are young. Overall, sexism continues to be reported, some overt, and much, like wider society, more subtle forms of prejudice such as exclusion or micro-management. That said, Servicewomen also report positive experiences of serving in the AF. These include being more visible to senior leaders, having access to greater opportunities and benefitting from more social and economic mobility than other organisations.

4. The evidence shows that servicewomen do face unique or additional challenges in the AF, amongst other things, that:
 - a. Women fair better at promotion boards but are less likely to get there due to a number of artificial barriers.
 - b. Women are ten times more likely to take Flexible Service. Stereo-typed gender expectations see women continuing to balance the lion's share of domestic responsibilities with work, for example.
 - c. 5% married servicemen are part of a service couple, 56% of married servicewomen are in a service couple. Service couples face their own unique challenges, and this regularly forces a decision as to whose career will take priority, with talented servicewomen often being the ones who ends up making the career compromises at the expense of their career progression.
 - d. 90% men OF5 rank (Captain RN, Colonel, Group Captain) have Children; 10% women OF5s do.
 - e. Less than 5% of OF7/2* rank (Rear Admiral, Major General, Air Vice Marshal) and above are women (none at OF9/4*, one at OF8/3* and 5 at OF7/2*). On current trajectory it will take decades for this to improve. Some assessments forecast over 300 years. It is identified that having 30% of an organisations senior leadership as women is the critical mass to achieve positive D&I change throughout.
 - f. While being a woman negatively impacts on experience in the AF, other factors such as class, race, age and position in the organisation can also negatively impact, thus compounding the overall negative effect for women.
 - g. There can be some positives aspects such as being visible and recognisable/memorable by senior leaders. Women and Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) personnel often felt that Defence provided them with social and economic mobility and better opportunities than other organisations.
 - h. A white male prototype is pervasive and undermines inclusion.
 - i. Issues faced by/experiences of minority groups are often unseen.
 - j. Some open resistance to D&I exists.
 - k. Discrimination in various forms persists.
 - l. Evidence of structural discrimination (including unintended consequences such as cutback in resources meaning no uniform specifically designed for women or resentment by colleagues covering maternity leave).
 - m. Leaders have a pivotal role to play in creating an inclusive environment.
5. At the single Service level, by way of an example, Royal Navy (RN) servicewomen report being more satisfied with their pay, work/life balance, leave, equipment, deployments and training opportunities than their male colleagues. As across the RN, there is significant difference in the satisfaction levels of officers, senior rates and junior rates but amongst servicewomen, the differences are more moderate and are less unidirectional than among the RN as a whole.
6. In terms of engagement, RN servicewomen report a low perception that they are valued by the Service. In contrast, only a small percentage do not feel pride in serving and more than half would actively recommend the Service to others. Women are less satisfied with the degree to which they are kept informed, have a significantly lower level of trust in the manager, and are less satisfied with leadership provided. Servicewomen report significantly less confidence in the effectiveness of local team function than do men, however they do not report feeling less fairly treated than men and perceptions of overall service morale are higher among women than men. With regard to equipment, perceived deficiencies are of far less concern to female personnel than among male personnel and

positive views on said items are significantly and substantially higher among women. Lastly, there are significantly higher satisfaction levels reported among women than men within matters related to deployment (but not wider quality of work), and the associated domains of leave, certain aspects of work/life balance and welfare.

7. Within the Army, servicewomen report the feeling of always being in the minority (servicewomen make up 10.9% of the Army) and operating in an organisation where historically kit, equipment and Terms and Conditions of Service (TACOS) have been designed around men. The AF are unique in the requirement for mobility and extended periods of separation, anecdotally this impacts more on servicewomen, particularly those who are parents and often take the lead for childcare.

8. Given the increasing numbers of women deploying into combat roles, MOD is assessing the provision and accessibility of sanitary products for personnel deploying on operations. MOD already provides personnel with essential items such as foot powder, toilet roll and insect repellent on exercises and deployments but is now investigating whether sanitary products should also be provided. This investigation will conclude in January 2021. Furthermore, the MOD will examine women's health policy throughout 2021.

1a. What about female BAME personnel?

9. There is limited evidence directly collected on staff that are both women and BAME; The current evidence suggests that being BAME and a woman compounds the association with more negative experiences of serving in the AF. It should be noted again, however, that many other characteristics beyond gender and ethnicity can also contribute to such experiences, including those white males who do not feel they confirm to the so-called 'white male prototype'.

10. With regards to Service Complaints (SC), the most recent Service Complaints Ombudsman Report (SCO) (2019) found that both women and BAME personnel continue to be overrepresented in the SC system (23% and 12% respectively) compared with their representation in the AF (11% and 8%). A relatively high proportion of women and BAME complaints were related to bullying and harassment (39% and 33%) compared with their male and white counterparts (21% and 23% respectively). The proportion of complaints by women had fallen, however, when compared with previous years. Interestingly, similar differences between BAME and white personnel in the Armed Forces Continuous Attitude Survey (AFCAS) were found not to be statistically significant.

11. The evidence from the SCO's 2019 Report support these conclusions:
- a. "For the fourth consecutive year, female and BAME personnel are overrepresented in the Service Complaints system when compared to their representation in the Armed Forces. This is an issue that was also highlighted by the Report on Inappropriate Behaviours and the Army Inspectorate."
 - b. "As in previous years, more than 10% of all Service Complaints were made by BAME personnel, despite them only comprising 8% of total Service strength. 33% of all Service Complaints made by BAME personnel concerned bullying, harassment or discrimination (BHD), a slight increase on 2018. This is compared to only 23% of all Service Complaints made by white personnel concerning the same issue."
 - c. "The Armed Forces Continuous Attitude Survey was unable to identify a statistically significant difference in the proportion of BAME Regular Service personnel who suffered at least one incident of bullying, harassment or discrimination

in the previous 12 months from the proportion for white Regular Service personnel (Source: AFCAS 2019).”

12. At the single Service level, within the RN, numbers of female BAME personnel participating in AFCAS are too small to provide statistically visible attitudinal data. Within the Army, BAME servicewomen make up an even smaller percentage of personnel so the acknowledgement of visible role models is a key concern. Limited data is currently held to differentiate between the experience of BAME servicewomen against their white peers. The Royal Air Force (RAF) has recognised the challenges faced and has sought to provide better support to female BAME personnel. Examples include introducing a change to the RAF Regulations for hairstyles to accommodate the different challenges faced by BAME personnel and measures to better support personnel and their families, particularly those from a Foreign & Commonwealth background.

1b. Are the Government and MOD doing enough to address these challenges? What more could be done? How effective are their strategies/initiatives?

13. The Defence D&I Strategy sets out how we will achieve our goal of being a truly diverse and inclusive organisation that is one of the top employers in the country and one of the best militaries in the world. We have made good progress on D&I but the 2018 – 2030 Strategy recognised the imperative to do more. Furthermore, the events of 2020 have provided a stark reminder of the inequalities that continue to exist in our society, within the AF and within Defence as a whole. It is mission critical for Defence - if we are to safeguard the security, stability and prosperity of our nation - that we recruit and retain the most able people drawn from the broadest diversity of thought, skills and background. While we have made some progress on matters of diversity, inclusion and inappropriate behaviour, we are clear that we have to improve the diversity and inclusion in Defence, and we are taking urgent action to access and maximise all our talent.

14. Defence has placed a particular importance on inclusive leadership, cultural and behavioural change. The Wigston Report and the recent Danuta Gray Report amplify this. There is a strong and visible commitment from across the top of Defence, as well as a thriving group of gender networks, advocates and champions. The resourcing of D&I Teams across the AF has increased, and this is accelerating change. We have also removed historic institutional barriers to increasing diversity throughout the organisation, such as opening up all combat roles in the AF to women for the first time and changing legislation to enable more flexible working for Service personnel.

15. The challenging vision, goals, objectives and commitments in Defence D&I Strategy clearly set out where we want to see change: building a more inclusive workplace for all; increasing diverse representation at all levels; and improving outreach into the wider community. An important component of this Strategy is to make diversity and inclusion part of normal business culture and behaviours. This is a key priority for everyone. The Whole Force – our Service personnel, Civil Servants and contractors – are expected to play their part in making a difference to the living and working experience of everyone in Defence.

16. A Gender Balance Working Group (WG) was formed just over a year and a large amount of evidence and data has been gathered to inform further work. It is believed that addressing the senior leadership first is pivotal to driving change throughout and they are working towards achieving 30% woman OF7/2* and above by 2030. They have identified five key work strands:

- a. Promotions/Reporting.
- b. Cultures and Behaviours.
- c. Families
- d. Lateral Entry and Re-Joiners
- e. Talent Management/Mentoring and Sponsorship

17. The WG recognises the complexity of the gender balance problem, there is no silver bullet and a number of interventions are required to improve the representation and quality of life of women in the AF. It is believed that addressing the senior leadership first is pivotal to driving change throughout. The WG has been formed for a year, it is entering the delivery stage of the first initiatives and it will be some time before intervention effectiveness can be measured. It should be noted that the WG is being undertaken as an additional role by people whose portfolios relate to the levers necessary to deliver the stated aims.

18. Within the Services, the RN has introduced Levels of Ambition (LOAs) which include a female focus, has established a D&I Taskforce to support the delivery of the LOAs, have D&I Advocates, and specifically a Gender Advocate and have introduced Active Bystander training to change the approach in tackling unacceptable behaviours. All this is backed up a RN D&I Communications Plan which links into MOD wider communications, and mandated behaviour focused D&I training to be completed biennially by all RN personnel, including bespoke D&I training to senior career courses. An Action Plan has been created to address shortfall and review existing policy, supported by benchmarking with external authorities. Both internal and external mentoring programmes have been made available and workshops introduced to raise awareness of the lived experience women to senior officers.

19. The Army has established the Army Servicewomen's' Network to provide a forum and source of support, assisted by the Army Parents, BAME and LGBT+ Networks. The network is funded centrally to enable networking and development events and supported by a post in the Army D&I Team. Mentoring programmes are in place to support the development of servicewomen and BAME service personnel. Reverse mentors for senior leaders help servicewomen's perspectives to be considered at board level and the Army Gender Champion and supporting advocates ensure all Army decisions are inclusive of women. Like the RAF, the Army continue to develop inclusive dress regulations. Equality Analysis for all policies, infrastructure and equipment will ensure all future developments consider women (and other minorities/protected characteristics).

1c. What effect has the introduction of the Armed Forces (Flexible Working) Act had?

20. Flexible Service (FS) policy provides a great degree of support for parents, whilst also potentially helping the AF attain a more gender balanced workforce. Most of those personnel who apply for FS are women, and most of those report that they are motivated to do so due to childcare commitments. Opportunities for flexible working conditions, having the option to work part time, and opportunity for reduced separated service have significantly greater positive influence on the intentions of servicewomen to remain in the AF than they do for male colleagues.

21. Of the three Services, it is understood that the RAF has the largest number of personnel on FS. It is judged that the promotion of FS has had a positive effect in driving the uptake in Flexible Working Arrangement (AWAs) which embrace Remote Working, Variable Start/Finish Times and Compressed Working variants. In promoting FS, the RAF was at

pains to highlight the utility of AWAs as another option to work flexibly. As for FS, the most cited reason for taking an AWA was childcare.

22. Beyond the promotion of flexible working, it should be noted that the RAF has a suite of parenthood-supporting policies designed to help all parents and mothers in particular. Servicewomen are entitled to take up to 52 weeks of maternity/adoption (Mat/Adop) leave. Providing certain earnings rules are met, they can receive 39 weeks of Statutory pay (Stat Pay), the first 26 of which may be enhanced to a full pay (known as Occ Pay). In respect of Shared Parental Leave and Pay (ShPL/ShPP), residual balances of Mat/Adop leave, Stat Pay and Occ Pay (post the mother having taken such leave/pay), may be shared between parents. Paid time off for IVF, ante-natal and pre-adoption appointments is available and free maternity uniforms are provided. Ten Keeping in Touch (KIT) days are available to enable personnel to undertake training or to keep in touch with major developments, without losing the right to Mat/Adop leave and pay. In respect of ShPL, personnel are entitled to an additional 20 KIT days. When RAF personnel notify HR specialists of pregnancy/adoption, they are given a 'New Parent Pack' which contains tailored information and planning tools. Line Managers are similarly issued booklets which offer guidance on how to support their staff through all stages of parenthood. Recognising the need for stability, particularly in the early years, mothers/primary adopters are screened from deployment for 18 months post-birth/adoption.

23. Additionally, the RAF funds the training of Physical Training Instructors in pre- and post-natal fitness, enabling them to work one-to-one with new mothers and run group classes. To facilitate attendance for such training, the RAF has obtained insurance cover to allow individuals to bring their children into RAF gyms. Welfare-focussed agencies are also on hand to further support mothers. The *Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen and Families Association* (SSAFA) offer a range of services for our personnel and their families including welfare and housing advice. The RAF Families Federation (RAF FF) provides an independent voice for RAF families and support two-way communication between RAF families and RAF/MOD policy makers. RAF charities also provide valuable support; for example, the RAF Benevolent Fund has funded the building of childcare facilities on or close to some of our Units whilst the Royal Air Forces Association manages some on-site childcare facilities on a not-for-profit basis, making childcare more affordable for RAF families. The RAF's efforts in respect of supporting mothers were recognised in May 20 in winning the Working Families 'Best for Mothers' award.

1d. Do female reservists face unique and/or additional challenges in the armed forces? Are they similar to those faced by regular female service personnel?

24. Given that women are often still the primary care giver in their household, it could be argued that the Reservist TACOS are therefore more attractive to women with child care responsibilities since they provide more control over their own career, particularly regarding time away from home and location moves for example. Furthermore, Reserve servicewomen have more flexibility and can move between contracts to support childcare. Indeed, many servicewomen move from the regular to reserve to support childcare, returning to full time reserve service later.

25. That said, finding reliable and affordable out of hours childcare is a significant issue for many women Reservists. The nature of Reserve training means it often takes place in evenings and weekends and therefore childcare is required outside of the hours of most mainstream childcare providers. Reservists often, therefore, pay a premium for this 'out of

hours' childcare, with costs potentially equaling or exceeding their Reserve pay. Lack of accessible and affordable childcare often reduces female Reservists' ability to regularly attend training, and at worst may result in female Reservists leaving the service completely. This issue is particularly exacerbated when both partners are Reservists, which is not uncommon, or when the other partner also works shifts or unsociable hours. It also disproportionately impacts female reservists who have a lower pay grade, where the cost of out of hours childcare may render reserve service less viable long term or leading to reduced attendance and slower career progression

26. The sporadic nature of Reserve service can restrict what can meaningfully be reported on in an appraisal year, regardless of gender. However, since the current appraisals guidance prevents maternity leave being mentioned in annual reports in an effort to avoid discrimination, pregnant Reserve servicewomen are further disadvantaged. A Reservist servicewoman who takes maternity leave will accumulate seemingly 'blank' annual reports where there is little activity to report on and where the reason for this cannot be explained. This can have significant impact on chances of promotion and career progression. A similar issue may affect our Regular counterparts, but the full-time nature of Regular service makes it more likely that at least something meaningful can be reported on for the part of the appraisal year worked. This issue can be further complicated by the promotion age cut offs which disproportionately disadvantage females who have taken time out to have a family, in both Regular and Reserves spheres, impacting on career progression.

27. Qualifying for maternity pay is based on a regular income every month and thus geared towards those in Regular service and not Reservists. It is complex and based on a finite time period within pregnancy. Reserve work does not fit with this criterion as we work sporadically and when needed. This is financially discriminatory.

28. The maternity support offered to Regular servicewomen on base, is far harder, or even impossible for a Reservist to access from a more remote geographical location and potentially out of normal working hours. The result is that maternity support to Reservists is extremely limited in practical terms, impacting for example on length of absence for maternity reasons and operational deployability in the long term. Reservists who do not live near a base are less likely to be able to get access to maternity-trained physical training and therefore lack specialist support to regain fitness after pregnancy.

2. Why do female service personnel choose to leave the armed forces? Are the reasons different to why men leave the armed forces?

29. Anecdotal evidence captured during the resettlement/transition process suggests that on the whole the reasons are generally the same irrespective of gender. The main reasons given concern the need for increased stability, time for a career change, as well as being a reflection of modern society, with 'a job for life' being an outdated concept. However, more servicewomen attribute leaving to starting a family than do male colleagues, with individuals indicating that combining motherhood and a service career is incompatible; this is particularly true in the case of service couples.

30. Within HR systems, the most recent data captured suggests that although the principle reasons servicewomen cite for submitting notice to leave differ slightly across the

three Services, overall, they are dominated by the following and closely mirror those given by male counterparts:

- a. Lack of job satisfaction.
- b. Desire to settle/live in a single area.
- c. Opportunities outside Service.
- d. Seeking fresh challenges.
- e. Dissatisfaction with overall career/promotion.

31. Although reasons given are near identical to male response patterns and levels, there appear to be some key differences. Servicewomen are much less likely to suggest 'overall career/promotion prospects' and 'pay and allowances' than male personnel, and are far more likely to indicate 'Operational commitments, overstretch, workload' or a 'firm offer of civilian employment'

3. How easy is it in practice for female service personnel to complain? What are the issues encouraging or hindering female personnel from complaining?

32. Within the MOD, the term 'complaint' can mean a SC (about any matter connected to a woman's Service) or a complaint made to the Police – or Commanding Officer – about unlawful behaviour. With regards to SC, the ability of all Serving or former Service personnel to raise a grievance about their Service Life is enshrined in law (Armed Forces Act 2006). Complaints which include a criminal offence must be referred to the civil or Service police for handling in the civilian or Service Justice System (SJS).

33. Since 2016 (when the first SCO took office) around 20% of all accepted SC came from women, although they represent only 11% of the total strength of the AF. Approximately 40% of SC made by women relate to BHD, the other main causes of complaint relate to either Career Management or pay and conditions of service. The Ombudsman raised concerns about the apparent overrepresentation of women and BAME personnel in the SC system, and MOD has duly commissioned an independent study regarding this issue.

34. Some analysis has already been conducted. The Army Inspectorate Review of the Army Service Complaints (SC) process in 2019 led to the identification of factors which may contribute to higher complaint rates by women. These include:

- a. More likely to be an attached to/operating in another unit therefore with potentially less pastoral care and unit cohesion.
- b. Higher proportion of women in Adjutant General's Corps with greater knowledge as to how to submit a SC.
- c. Active bystander and other D&I training creating an expectation that some groups are disadvantaged leading to this being perceived as a reason for not promoting etc when that may not be the case.
- d. The aforementioned training and awareness may also make women feel more comfortable about complaining.
- e. There are also a number of offences over which women can be 'wronged' related to prohibited grounds (for example Sex and Harassment or Pregnancy and Discrimination) which are less likely to - or cannot - apply to men.
- f. Some financial redress (Vento payments) are only available in the event of a breach of the Equality Act.

35. Advice and guidance relating to how a complaint can be made is found in MOD Guidance, Joint Service Publications (JSPs) 831 and 763. These policies can be found on the internet and contain all necessary advice and forms to facilitate the raising of a grievance

by anyone in the AF. Furthermore, all complainants should have access to an Assisting Officer (AO) who can provide support and assistance during the progress of the complaint. Should any servicewoman (or man) feel that they require additional advice or support it can be provided through unit welfare channels, or external bodies such as the Ombudsman's Office or veterans' charities. However, the SC cannot be made by a third party because legislation prevents anyone other than the Service person from doing so as it is believed the Service person can best describe the wrong that they feel. If for any reason a servicewoman (on indeed any service person) does not wish to submit a complaint to the Commanding Officer, she can ask the SCO to refer her intention to make a SC to her Chain of Command via the SCO website.

36. During the recent review of the SC system (which has brought together recommendations from the Ombudsman, the HCDC and the Wigston Report) the Service Complaints Transformation team have identified several improvements which should increase accessibility and confidence to use the SC system. These included development of an easy read guide for the revision of JSP831, earlier access to an AO for greater support during the process, and publishing of anonymous SC outcomes, particularly in cases of unacceptable behaviour, to ensure Defence personnel can see that action is taken in response to complaints being made.

37. On the issue of complaints about unlawful behaviour – particularly sexual offences which the Committee have highlighted – we understand that some women may be concerned about the level of support they will receive, and also the actual process of dealing with their case. These concerns may affect their decision to make a complaint and have a bearing on to whom they make it. Victims of the most serious crime, persistently targeted victims and vulnerable or intimidated victims all require enhanced support. We do not underestimate the devastating impact that a sexual assault, or other serious crime, can have on a person. The MOD handles complaints of this nature with the utmost seriousness.

38. Guidance is widely available for Commanding Officers and victims when dealing with allegations of serious criminal offences. The Victims' Services policy document (JSP 839), sets out the services to be provided as required by the Armed Forces Code of Practice for Victims of Crime (which closely follows the Ministry of Justice Victims Code for the criminal civilian justice system). The MOD Victims Code includes detailed guidance of the support to be provided to victims of rape and other serious offences. Support includes (but is not limited to), adaptation of working patterns, temporary changes to locations, consideration of additional leave request or even change of career.

39. Furthermore, guidance was reiterated and republished in June 2020, which sets out the rights and responsibilities of personnel under the MOD's commitment to the Armed Forces Code of Practice for Victims of Crime. This included the reminder that personnel have the right to report serious crimes alleged to have been committed in the UK, including rape and sexual assaults, to the civilian police as well as the Service police. The MOD is taking forward the recommendations made in the SJS Review in relation to the provision of welfare and support provided to victims, including the creation of a witness care unit and developing training for Commanding Officers to assist them in identifying vulnerable victims and witnesses to ensure they receive the appropriate support.

40. AFCAS 2020 demonstrates that the three most common reasons why Service personnel did not submit a formal written Service complaint about the bullying, harassment and/or discrimination they experienced are:

- a. I did not believe anything would be done if I did complain;
- b. I believed it might adversely affect my career; and,
- c. I did not want to go through the complaints procedure.

42. Within the single Services, work is ongoing. For example, the Army continues to ensure all personnel receive a brief on the SC process and the SCO each year as part of mandatory training. The RAF, recognising that there is no data available to them specific to women, has instigated a review of SC of BHD brought and concluded during period 2016 – 2019, in order to establish any common themes, particularly in relation to women (and BAME) complainants. The RAF has also introduced a satisfaction survey for all users of the SC process intended to enable the analysis of any common themes that may be preventing personnel who share protected characteristics from bringing a complaint. Finally, it is intended that the use of the Defence BHD Helpline will enable the Services and MOD to identify barriers to, or concerns with, raising matters formally.

4. Do female service personnel face unique and/or additional challenges during transition to civilian life?

43. We do not consider that servicewomen face specific or additional challenges during their transition to civilian life, and the level of support provided to Service leavers is therefore consistent and equitable. The MOD introduced a new Holistic Transition policy in October 2019, to better coordinate and manage Service personnel and their families' transition from military to civilian life. A new organisation, 'Defence Transition Services' was established at the same time to assist those facing the greatest challenges to making a successful transition on their discharge. Holistic Transition support builds on the highly successful Career Transition Partnership (CTP), which has provided employment support and job finding services for the last 20 years through MOD resettlement policy. MOD transition policy links to Maternity policy to ensure servicewomen are able to access the full range of CTP services, adjusting the entitlement period if required.

44. Servicewomen may inadvertently face additional challenges to a successful transition to civilian life as a result of taking OML (Ordinary Maternity Leave) if it is their intention to leave the AF after OML or have to leave suddenly or unexpectedly. In some case they may be unable to prepare for resettlement sufficiently early enough to make full use of their resettlement entitlements whilst in service. Servicewomen should be encouraged to start their transition to civilian life prior to going on OML if it is their intention to leave the AF after OML. A solution to this is being developed. This chimes with one of the principles of transition – “move the preparation and awareness of future civilian challenges from the resettlement starting point (which is normally two years at most before discharge) to much earlier in a service person’s career.” (JSP 100 Defence Holistic Transition Policy). Transition is the through-life approach to preparing for civilian life, as such, it is not just the final two years of service life – the ‘resettlement’ period - that are important.

4a. What can Government, the MoD and industry do to address these

45. The MOD is doing more than ever to provide support to Service leavers, including the further development of the Life Skills package of training as part of the Defence Holistic Transition Policy. This support relates to a whole range of life changing issues, which affect both the Service person and their immediate family. This could include help with life's basic needs such registering with a doctor or a dentist, or it could be much more intensive for those with complex needs (including housing, budgeting, debt, wellbeing and children’s education).

46. MOD policy officials sit as members of the Confederation of Service Charities (COBSEO) Women Veterans Cluster, formed last year, in order to understand female

veterans issues and to be able to feedback to MOD from a policy perspective where issues could have been prevented or the experience of transition improved by altering conditions in service.

47. At the single Service level, the RN, for example, believes that best practice in industry should be highlighted, demonstrating Service Leaver programmes that are keen to recruit and support departing servicewomen championed through Defence Relationship Management and the Armed Forces Covenant with organisations who have had particularly successful programmes. The RN reports that these organisations often express a desire to reach out to women Service leavers but do not know how to do so. Some focused work with the CTP could link the two together using case studies and success stories as powerful and positive tools. The RN encourages all Service leavers and their families to refer to the latest edition of the Naval Families Federation's Transition Guide: Families Transition Too! for all-round holistic support.

5. What are the issues faced by women veterans once they have left the services?

48. While many women veterans successfully transition into civilian life, we recognise that some do face challenges, including those particular to women veterans. We acknowledge the importance of gaining an understanding of the specific issues that women veterans face. Research into this is currently being conducted by the COBSEO Women's Cluster and the 'Salute Her' study (into the experience and needs of women veterans) was published by Forward Assist in 2019.

49. The Office for Veterans' Affairs within the Cabinet Office therefore fully supports the work of the COBSEO Women's cluster, and recognise there's always more to be done to provide the research and evidence required to further understand the issues and challenges facing female veterans, and to raise the profile of these issues within the charity sector as well as within Government.

50. Recent research conducted by the MOD into the CTP service, indicates that any differences in employment outcomes for women veterans using the CTP are in line with the gender differences seen in the comparable non-veteran population. This includes civilian industries worked in, those taking up further education, and those who are economically inactive due to family commitments. For women service leavers who left during 2018/19 and used a CTP billable service, the unemployment rate was no different to that seen for male service leavers.

51. Defence Statistics has assessed the differences observed between women and men veterans as well as women veteran and women non-veteran responses to the Office of national Statistics (ONS) Annual Population Survey (APS) and the England and Wales Census 2011. For the years 2014 to 2017 MOD paid for a series of questions to be included in the ONS's Annual Population Survey (APS) which identified responses from ex-service personnel. Through the questions asked in the APS we were able to estimate the size and socio-demographic characteristics of the UK AF veteran population residing in Great Britain. Due to the small number of women veterans within the response sampled for the APS, the level of uncertainty around the estimate for females is higher and therefore results should be interpreted with caution. Furthermore, it cannot be assumed that any differences identified were caused by service in the UK AF as varying lengths of time had elapsed since the respondents served.

52. In terms of health, the data suggests that even though women veterans of working age (16-65) were not more likely to report any specific long-term health problems when compared to male veterans of the same age, and were less likely to report difficulty with hearing and diabetes. Women veterans of retirement age (65+) were more likely to report long term health problems relating to arms or hands and; back or neck. These differences were also observed in the non-veteran population. It should be noted that they were less likely to report heart, blood pressure or circulation problems.

53. With regard to employment status, women veterans of working age were no more likely to be unemployed compared to male veterans indicating, at the top level, that gaining employment is not a challenge for women veterans. That said, differences were observed in the occupations and industries which working age women veterans were employed in when compared to male veterans of the same age. Women veterans of working age were statistically less likely to be employed in skilled trade and, process, plant and machine operative occupations compared to men veterans of the same age. They were statistically more likely to be in professional, administrative and secretarial and, caring, leisure and other service occupations. These differences were observed in the non-veteran population. However, in the non-veteran population, women were statistically less likely to be in manager, director and senior official occupations; this was not observed in the veteran population.

54. Female working age veterans were less likely to have no academic or professional qualification and more likely to have a qualification at degree level or equivalent when compared to male veterans of the same age. This difference was also observed when comparing female veterans to females in England and Wales indicating, at the top level, that gaining qualifications was not a challenge for female veterans.

6. Are the needs of female veterans currently met by the available veteran services?

55. Women veterans are currently able to access all support services that are available to the veteran community as a whole, for example through National Health Service (NHS) care pathways for mental and physical health, employment and transition support through the MOD, and housing support through Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government and Local Authorities. Additionally, there are services specific to women veterans available through voluntary organisations. As civilians, women veterans also have access to regular services provided to the population as a whole, both statutory services and those provided by the charity sector. However, we recognise the role of further research in understanding whether the services currently available fully meet the needs of women veterans.

56. Currently, data collected by the Department of Health and Social Care indicate that women veterans tend towards using NHS mental health services in place for the general population, rather than bespoke services for veterans. Women veterans make up 5% of those referred to the bespoke CTS and Transition, Intervention and Liaison Service (TILS) mental health services for veterans within the NHS, and 18.7% of veterans referred to Improving Access to the Psychological Services (IAPT), (available for the general population) are women. Comparatively it is estimated that currently 11% of the veteran population is women.

57. In the Strategy for our Veterans, the Government committed to improve the collection and analysis of data on veterans' needs and experiences, in order to better inform and deliver a policy and service provision, and it is important that this work includes the collection of better data on female veterans. This will help the Government understand better whether or not the services currently in place for all veterans, regardless of their gender, are meeting the specific needs of women veterans.